

**CONFLICTS,
COMMUNICATION,
AND RELATIONSHIPS**

CREDITS

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TEACHER'S RESOURCE BOOK

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INTRODUCTION

Perhaps there is no greater frustration than being misunderstood: “No, that’s not what I mean!” “You don’t understand what I’m saying to you.” “Are you even listening to me?” The anguish in these phrases is easy to sense. We are the most sophisticated species on earth, yet we regularly have difficulty communicating with one another. The animal kingdom manages to survive and to prosper with a few sounds and signals for communication. Humans would appear to have it easy with our infinite ways to say things. However, it is our very complex nature that often leads us to conflicts and miscommunications.

Adolescence marks the development of advanced cognitive skills. Abstract reasoning is present for the first time. Teenagers spend hours thinking. They ponder the meaning of relationships. They obsess about remarks made to them. They analyze the lyrics of their music. They debate the injustices of an early curfew!

Along with these newfound skills comes the ability to argue well. Many parents find these endless deliberations with their teenagers a bit trying. However, the reality is that adolescents are flexing their new cognitive muscles and questioning whether they should have to do things just “because I said so.” Bargaining and negotiating are real options now. In contrast, few preadolescents have the cognitive skills to understand why they can say “no”—the young child’s world is far too concrete.

One of the challenges that teenagers face is developing their own opinions and standing by their beliefs. It is one thing to argue with a friend; it is another to take on an authority figure. It is important for all of us to be respectful of others’ opinions. Unfortunately, some individuals will use their positions to manipulate others. For example, some authority figures will take a “do it or else” stance. Teenagers must learn to think clearly and negotiate well in these stressful situations.

It is important to acquire good reasoning skills during this critical period of cognitive development. It is equally important to keep our emotions in check during stressful interactions. These and other elements are important in enhancing productive communication. The video *Conflicts, Communication, and Relationships* and the activities in this Teacher’s Resource Book will teach students how to communicate effectively and how to handle conflict in a variety of relationships. Learning to communicate well now will provide your students with a lifetime of benefits.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After viewing *Conflicts, Communication, and Relationships* and participating in class discussion and activities described in this Teacher's Resource Book, your students will be able to:

- recognize faulty communication
- identify their own common communication errors
- determine their primary sources of conflict
- recognize and address manipulation and coercion
- understand how poor communication leads to conflict and misunderstanding
- learn the four basic steps to enhancing communication
- gain skills in conflict resolution
- develop confidence in their ability to communicate with others

PROGRAM SUMMARY

Conflicts, Communication, and Relationships captures the attention immediately as Roger and his younger sister head for trouble in the form of a minor car accident. While the accident is only a “fender bender,” Roger’s sister and the adult whose car was hit react in such a way as to escalate things quickly. Despite some clear efforts at communicating, Roger is ultimately reduced to screaming and yelling as the situation rapidly deteriorates. The scene ends with a frozen frame of Roger’s anguished face.

Two teenage narrators who sympathize with Roger’s plight are introduced. They present four basic skills for effective communication: (1) Have a clear goal and know what you want to say; (2) Be aware of emotions and body language; (3) Be a good listener and reflect this back; and (4) Know how and when to compromise.

The narrators then introduce another scene between two friends, Fred and Joe, who are about to “hit a traffic jam on the communication highway.” Joe is sitting on the front steps of his home as Fred approaches. Joe is clearly angry at Fred. In fact, he is so mad that he does a poor job of expressing himself. As a result, Fred has no idea what Joe is talking about. The scene ends with both friends angry and Fred walking away. The two narrators return and, using the four skills introduced above, explain why this interaction was ineffective. The same scene is then replayed, this time using effective communication techniques. The outcome is very different and quite positive.

Next, the narrators direct us to a more complex scene between a mother and daughter. The viewer hears spoken words as well as inner thoughts as this pair struggles to communicate, thus allowing the viewer to understand some of the motivation behind each person’s comments. The daughter is upset after a phone call with her boyfriend. The mother tries to find out what is bothering her. Both are actually so focused on their own feelings that they never really hear what the other is trying to say. The narrators suggest that the thoughts we hear express more than the spoken words. Again, the scene is replayed with the use of the four basic communication skills. The outcome is significantly improved.

Dr. Deborah Gatins, a clinical psychologist, appears on screen and addresses the scene between mother and daughter. She explains how the mother’s “calm” stance is perceived by the daughter as uncaring and how this is a common problem in adult-teenager interactions. She also applies the first three basic communication skills to the before and after scenes and outlines how their use dramatically alters the outcome.

In the next scene we meet a boyfriend and a girlfriend who are arguing and upset about conflicting plans. They had agreed to and planned an important party together. However, the boyfriend has just learned that the party falls on the only weekend he will get to spend with his divorced father this summer. Both teenagers fail to communicate effectively and end up walking away mad. The narrators comment, “Now that was rough!” They mention how emotions clearly clouded the issues in this interaction.

PROGRAM SUMMARY (CONTINUED)

We are again presented with Dr. Gatins, who emphasizes the problems with emotions in this scene. She explains how both teenagers are disappointed and seeking comfort from each other. As their emotions escalate, they misinterpret the other's comments and are upset by a perceived lack of support. Dr. Gatins suggests that time apart to "chill out" would be most helpful for this couple. The scene is then replayed with some time having passed. We watch the couple use the four basic skills and do a much better job communicating.

The narrators then suggest that viewers take a break and think about a time they failed to communicate effectively because emotions got in the way. They quickly review the four basic communication skills and the video breaks. (You may let the video run or stop it here and see *Notes to the Teacher* for class activities.)

[Break]

In the next segment, the narrators introduce another element. They ask, "What do you do when a conflict is not with a friend or a relative but with a teacher, a coach, or a boss?" This introduces the role of "authority" or "status" in communication. The video now moves to a scene between a teenager and her boss. The boss tells the teen she needs to cover a shift for an employee who has called in sick. The teen reminds the boss that she asked for this weekend off a month ago. The boss basically tells her that she must work or risk losing her job. The scene escalates, ending with an angry teen saying, "I quit!"

Dr. Gatins addresses the issue of status in this scene. She points out that even though the boss is the boss, he stands to lose too if the teen quits. She encourages teenagers to consider this in any interaction in which they feel they have the lower status.

A reenactment of this scene demonstrates a more successful outcome when the teen makes a genuine effort to compromise. Dr. Gatins points out how the teen gets control of her emotions and begins negotiating with her boss. She says it is common for one person to give a little upon perceiving that the other has made some concessions, which is important in learning how to compromise. She also notes that this teen is a fast thinker and that not all of us could have proposed a solution so quickly. She encourages teens to "buy time" when they cannot think of an immediate solution or compromise.

The narrators return and recap the four basic skills. Finally, they suggest that viewers think about the opening scene, which is replayed here at the end. Students are challenged to put themselves in Roger's place and, using the four basic skills, suggest how this scene could have had a happier ending.

NOTES TO THE TEACHER

Before Showing the Video:

Your class needs no preparation in order to appreciate this video. You may simply introduce it as a video about effective communication. However, if you wish, you may assign any of the *Research Projects* (Worksheet 1) as a way to get your class to start thinking about communication.

During the Video:

There is a break scheduled into the video to allow for class discussion. You may choose to skip the break and let the video continue. If you wish to engage the class in discussion at this time, consider the following suggestions.

At the break, the narrators ask viewers to think about a time they failed to communicate effectively because emotions got in the way. Ask your class:

- Does it seem possible to you that emotions could get in the way of saying what you think or feel?
- What kinds of emotions disrupt communication? Are negative or positive emotions more problematic? (Responses will vary based on individual experiences.)
- Do you always know how you feel about something before you discuss it with someone else?
- How often have you wished you had taken some time before you spoke about an important issue with someone? Can you remember a time that you did wait and things went better?
- Do people say what they “really mean” when they are extremely upset or angry? (The answer is no. People say things that they do not mean, that do not make sense, and that are difficult to explain after they have calmed down.)

At the End of the Video:

At the end of the video, viewers are challenged to rework the first scene using the four basic communication skills introduced in the video. At this point you may choose to distribute Fact Sheets 1A-1D or use them as lecture notes. This exercise is designed to get students to start thinking about these skills and putting them into practice. You may choose to have the class discuss this now and/or return to it after having worked on some of the enclosed activities.

Here are some things to keep in mind when analyzing this last scene:

➤ **Have a clear goal and know what you want to say.**

When you have a car accident, you need to exchange insurance information. Roger did try to accomplish this. However, the adult in the scene was angry and abusive (“I don’t know why they let you people drive!”). She was unwilling to communicate with Roger and chose to call the police.

➤ **Be aware of your emotions and body language.**

With his sister whining and yelling and the adult threatening and insulting, it is no wonder that Roger loses control of his emotions. However, this is problematic as he then appears to be unreasonable. With his body language and yelling, he begins to look scary and we hear the adult tell the police, “I think he could get violent.” Roger would have done better to get back in the car as soon as the adult said she was calling the police. He could have asked his sister to please be quiet and he could have collected his thoughts in anticipation of the police officer’s arrival.

➤ **Be a good listener and reflect this back.**

Unfortunately, no one was listening to Roger. The adult was unwilling to engage in any level of communication. It would be interesting to ask the class if they think she would have had the same reaction had Roger been an adult. (She certainly makes discriminatory remarks, such as “you people,” and treats him as if he were lesser in “status.”)

Roger could have made an effort to calm her by reflecting back what he was hearing and seeing: “Okay Ma’am, I see you are upset. So am I. I’ve never had an accident before. Let’s talk about what we need to do here. I’m more than willing to cooperate with you.” (Her demeanor and poor treatment of him may lead the class to want to say, “No way! Why be nice to her when she’s being a jerk?” In this case, you can remind the class that it is in Roger’s best interest to keep this woman calm and reasonable before the police arrive.)

Roger could also have taken a moment to try to calm his sister. Telling her to “Shut up!” even though she was being difficult did not help. Her reaction may be due to her own fear. Roger could have lowered his voice and with genuine sympathy said, “I know you are worried about being late. I imagine this is scary for you. But I need you to help me out here. This woman is not listening to me and I can’t have you yelling at me while I’m trying to deal with her. Can you understand that? Give me a few minutes. I’m just glad you are okay.”

➤ **Know how and when to compromise.**

This scene does not lend itself to compromise.

NOTES TO THE TEACHER (CONTINUED)

After the Video:

Several interesting worksheets and fact sheets follow. It is up to you to decide how many class sessions should be devoted to this topic. You might begin the class following the video presentation by giving a brief lecture on the four basic communication skills, using Fact Sheets 1A-1D as a guide.

Please review the activities in the next section. You may choose to do them in class or assign some as homework.

STUDENT WORKSHEETS

RESEARCH PROJECT

Research one of the topics from the following list. Write a brief paper on your findings. You can gather information at your school or local library, as well as on the Internet. Use a *Resource Tracker* (Worksheet 1B) to collect information.

Animal Talk

Choose an animal group and research how that group communicates with one another. Be sure to consider basic life needs such as securing food, territory, and a mate. Many animal groups also have a means of warning one another in times of danger. What other circumstances prompt communication among your animal group? Investigate these areas and compare “animal talk” with human communication.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution has become a popular topic. Research any current book or article on this topic and summarize what you believe to be the most important lessons in resolving conflicts.

Give and Take

The *reciprocity principle* of social psychology states that when somebody gives us something, we feel we must give something in return. If someone does us a favor, we feel that we owe him/her. If we are bargaining and someone offers us a concession, we feel pressure to increase our offer. Investigate this principle and discuss how it influences our ability to compromise.

Persuasive Communication

Sometimes we are aware that someone is openly trying to convince us of something. However, there are many subtle tactics used by advertisers and politicians who are seeking to get our attention so we will buy their products or vote for their agendas. Research techniques in persuasive communication and discuss how they apply to our day-to-day living.

Communicating Our Intentions

How do others know what our intentions are? Can they read our intended message on our faces, see it in our body language, or hear it in our words? Research and discuss how verbal and nonverbal communication work together to convey our messages.

RESOURCE TRACKER

Title of book or article:	Title of book or article:
Author(s):	Author(s):
Published by:	Published by:
Copyright date:	Copyright date:
Subject covered:	Subject covered:
Quote(s):	Quote(s):
Notes:	Notes:

SOURCES OF CONFLICT (CONTINUED)

Part 3: Points to P onder

If you realize you are arguing with the **same person** about all kinds of things, this may indicate a problem communicating with this person. You need to examine your relationship with him/her:

- Is there an unresolved conflict that continues to influence your interactions?
- Is there something unique about the way you two interact? Are you too similar? Too different? Etc.

If you find that you are arguing about one particular issue with many different people, you need to take a good, hard look at this issue.

- Why are you fighting about it so much?
- Do you need to change some aspect of your life related to this issue?

STATUS AND COMMUNICATION

The following exercise will help you understand how status elements influence communication. “Status” refers to the role or relative position we believe we have whenever we interact with another. In order to benefit from the exercise, you need to complete it in the order given. **DO NOT READ AHEAD.**

Part Ia: Dialogue

A: Do you have the homework sheets I gave you at the end of school yesterday?
 B: No. I forgot them. Sorry.
 A: Sorry! What kind of excuse is that?
 B: Not a very good one, I guess.
 A: You can say that again. Now what do you suggest we do?

Role Play One: Two volunteers from class are to read the dialogue out loud. This is an interaction between *two friends*. Be realistic in the emotional tone and body language you might use in this situation.

Role Play Two: Two volunteers are to read the dialogue out loud. This is an interaction between a *teacher (A)* and *student (B)*. Be realistic in the emotional tone and body language you might use in this situation.

Part Ib: Questions f or Discussion

By now it is obvious that the **exact** same dialogue can sound quite different when it is used in situations of varying status. Consider the following:

1. How is the tone of the conversation different: If A and B are friends? If A and B are teacher and student? Why did it change?

2. Were there differences in body language? What were they? What did those gestures communicate?

3. Summarize how body language and emotional tone affect the meaning of the same dialogue.

STATUS AND COMMUNICATION (CONTINUED)**Part 2a: A New Ending**

Go back to the dialogue and improvise the ending for each of the scenarios. Begin with the same opening and see how differences in status influence how the conversation ends. Keep in mind that in both cases the friend and the teacher are equally interested in getting those homework sheets as soon as possible.

Part 2b: Questions f or Discussion

Discuss the two outcomes. Consider the following:

1. How did status effect the outcome?

2. Compare the body language in each scenario. How did it differ?

3. Compare the emotional tone and the volume of speech. Did these vary in the scenarios?

4. Did differences in status help or hinder a positive outcome?

5. Did the teenager who forgot the sheets express himself/herself equally well in the two role plays?

APPLYING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

You will need a blank *Answer Sheet* (Worksheet 4B) for each of the three scenarios in this exercise. Scenarios 1, 2, and 3 (Worksheet 4C) are examples of ineffective communication. Read each scenario and consider the specific problems each pair is having. (Refer to Fact Sheets 1A-1D to review the four basic communication techniques.) On the answer sheet evaluate how well each of the four basic communication skills was used. Below is a brief example.

Example: Jane and Carol, two friends, walking to school together.

Jane: *(Thinking to herself, "I am determined to get Carol to give me back the earrings she borrowed. I will just be direct about it.")* Carol, when can I get my earrings back?

Carol: Oh gosh, I completely forgot about them. Sorry. It's just that I have been so upset about this whole thing with David. I still can't believe he said that to Frank. Did Wendy tell you what happened?

Jane: Yes. I spoke with her last night. I wouldn't worry about it too much. I'm sure it will be fine. *(Pauses)* Do you think I could stop by later and pick up my earrings?

Carol: I hope you're right. I mean, what will people think about me? I just can't stop thinking about it. Do you think you could talk to Frank for me today?

Jane: *(Feeling like she just doesn't know how to be more direct, sighs)* Sure.

SAMPLE ANSWER SHEET

Part 1. How effectively was each of the four basic communication skills used?

GOAL: Good. Jane is clear that she wants to get her earrings back.

EMOTIONS/BODY LANGUAGE: Jane's emotions seem stable. Carol seems too upset to communicate well. Can't tell much about body language in this scenario.

LISTENING: Jane is listening. Carol is not.

COMPROMISE: Not applicable here. Jane should get her earrings back. No need for compromise.

Part 2. Your suggestions for how to improve communication:

Jane can be sympathetic to her friend's problem but still get her needs met. She needs to ask Carol if she has heard her request for the earrings. She is giving up too easily. She could say, "Carol, I know you are upset and I'd be happy to talk about this. But can you please just tell me first if I can come get my earrings after school today?"

APPLYING COMMUNICATION SKILLS (CONTINUED)

ANSWER SHEET

Use this sheet to help you organize your thoughts as you analyze the problems in communication presented in Scenarios 1, 2, and 3. You will need an answer sheet for each of the scenarios.

Part 1. How effectively was each of the four basic communication skills used?

GOAL: _____

EMOTIONS/BODY LANGUAGE: _____

LISTENING: _____

COMPROMISE: _____

Part 2. Your suggestions for how to improve communication:

APPLYING COMMUNICATION SKILLS (CONTINUED)

SCENARIO I

Vicki and her dad get along as well as most fathers and teenage daughters. Now that she is driving, they seem to argue more. Dad is always commenting on how she has parked the car, whether or not she left enough gas in it, or how many friends she drives around. This weekend she has tickets to a concert with some friends. Her father had agreed to drive everyone long before she got her license. Now that she has it, she'd rather drive herself and her friends. Dad is sitting in the living room, reading the newspaper. It seems like a good time to ask.

Vicki: You know, Dad, there's no reason you have to waste your Friday night driving us to the concert. Now that I have my license I can do it myself.

Dad: *(Hears her but is a bit distracted)* That's okay. I don't mind.

Vicki: But really, Dad, wouldn't you rather do something else?

Dad: Not really. I knew what I was getting into when I agreed to it last month. It's no problem.

Vicki: Actually, I'd kind of prefer to drive myself.

Dad: *(Looks up at her now, realizing there is another agenda here)* Oh...well... You know, I think I'd feel more comfortable driving all of you. You never know what kind of traffic there'll be at these things...And I'm sure some people will be drinking. No, it's just a better idea for me to do it as we originally planned.

Vicki: *(Loses her temper)* I can't stand that you don't trust me!

Dad: *(Surprised by her outburst)* Who said anything about trusting you?

Vicki: *(With attitude)* Oh please, that crack about drinking and everything...

Dad: *(Annoyed)* Listen, I didn't say you would be drinking—I said others will drink. I just feel better driving all of you. Besides, this arrangement was fine a few weeks ago. Why are you making such a big deal out of it now?

Vicki: Oh, forget it! You just don't understand anything. *(Starts to leave the room)*

Dad: *(Rises, angry now)* Wait a minute, young lady! Don't take that attitude with me. I'm going to drive you and your friends to a concert and you have the nerve to yell at me?! You know, I am sick and tired of your outbursts. How would you like it if nobody drives to the concert? You can sit here all night, just you and your bad attitude.

Vicki: What are you going to do, lock me in my room? I'm not a kid anymore. I wish you'd stop treating me like one. *(Storms out of the room)*

Dad: *(Calls after her)* Yeah, well, it would help if you'd stop acting like one! *(Shakes his head, throws up his hands, and sits back down to read the paper)*

APPLYING COMMUNICATION SKILLS (CONTINUED)**SCENARIO 2**

Coach Rivers has led his school's team to many victories. People think he is a great coach, but Tom thinks he is a jerk. It is the students who work hard; the coach just got lucky. The team works well together and everyone manages to get along. Coach has called an extra practice this weekend. The team is annoyed because they are doing well and don't see the need for it. More importantly, there is a big barbecue planned at a friend's house and most of the team was planning on going. Tom is the team's captain and has been asked to talk to the coach about canceling the extra practice. They are about to begin Friday afternoon practice. Coach is in his office. Tom knows this is the only good opportunity he'll have to talk to him. Maybe he could suggest a compromise, something to do with how they perform on the field today, or maybe...

Tom: *(Knocks on Coach's door)*

Coach: In!

Tom: *(Politely)* Can I talk to you for a minute?

Coach: *(Doesn't look up from whatever he is reading)* Speak.

Tom: Some of us are wondering if we could get you to consider canceling tomorrow's extra practice...

Coach: *(Looks up now, doesn't say anything)*

Tom: *(Continues quickly)* Well, it's just that...I mean...we are doing well this season and we have some plans... and we thought that, uh....

Coach: *(Quiet volume but menacing tone)* You boys think you know how to run a team now? Is that it? You gonna tell me how to do my job?

Tom: *(Fumbling now)* No, of course not.

Coach: Then what the hell are you doing in here? I need to see you on the field in five minutes.

Tom: *(Doesn't move, seems to be trying to think of something to say)*

Coach: *(Looking back down at the work on this desk)* Move along, son.

Tom: *(Leaves the office)*

APPLYING COMMUNICATION SKILLS (CONTINUED)

SCENARIO 3

Brian and Patty have been going out for a while. They care about each other very much. They are watching TV at her house. No one else is home. Brian has been wanting to have sex with Patty for quite some time. He thinks this is a perfect opportunity. He starts kissing Patty and things get quite passionate. He starts to make some obvious moves toward things becoming more physically intimate.

Patty: *(Smiling and flushed)* Slow down, babe.

Brian: *(Looking intense)* Why? Let's be together, Patty. I think we're ready.

Patty: *(Pulls away, more alert now)* I don't know, Brian. That's a big step. I think we should talk about it.

Brian: *(Clearly NOT in the mood to talk, pulls her back to him and moves to kiss her)* Why talk when we can do this?

Patty: *(Gives in to his kisses but pulls away again)* I'm serious. I'm not ready for this, Brian. *(Caresses his face)* You know I love you. Please understand.

Brian: *(Sensing this is not going to happen, feeling frustrated, maybe getting angry)* What's to understand? I don't think you really care for me, or you wouldn't put me through this.

Patty: *(Stung by his response, hurt)* Put you through what? What did I do?

Brian: It's more what you didn't do. *(Pulls away)* I think we are the only couple on the planet who hasn't had sex. I'm a normal guy, Patty. How long do you expect me to wait?

Patty: *(Confused, doesn't want to hurt Brian, but is upset by his questioning her feelings for him)* Are you saying I don't care about you because we haven't had sex? Or are you just telling me you want to keep up with the other guys? What is this really about, Brian? Do you care, or is this a game for you?

Brian: *(Frustrated and angry)* Don't talk to me about playing games. You can't get a guy all worked up like that and then just pull away.

Patty: *(Angry, resents the accusation)* So I'm not supposed to kiss you now? You seemed to be enjoying yourself. Or is it all just about scoring?

Brian: *(Openly hostile)* Give me a break! If I just wanted to score there are plenty of girls out there I could have.

Patty: Really. Well then, why are you wasting your time here?

Brian: Good point. I'm outta here! *(Begins to leave the room)*

Patty: *(Holding back tears, angry and hurt)* Fine. Good luck!

Brian: *(Slams the door on his way out)*

MANIPULATION, COERCION, OR COMPROMISE?

Read Fact Sheet 2 to learn about *manipulation*, *coercion*, and *compromise*. Then, test your knowledge with this exercise.

Instructions: Review each scenario below and decide which involve coercive or manipulative behavior and which are examples of healthy compromises. Using the *Answer Sheet* (Worksheet 5B), label each as *compromise*, *manipulation*, or *coercion*.

1. Phil is tired of listening to Al's music. He plays the same CDs all the time. They are hanging out at Al's house now. Phil has decided he's had it and says, "I'm sick of these tapes. Shut this stuff off or I'm leaving."
2. Susan would love to borrow Michelle's red sweater for her date Friday night. She knows it is expensive and is a bit hesitant to ask. After thinking about it, she decides she will suggest that Michelle could borrow her gold earrings in exchange. She knows Michelle loves them, and it seems a fair trade.
3. Rita needs to get to the mall. She knows her sister won't drive her if she asks her. It's just not fair. All her sister cares about is what her friends are doing. Actually, that gives her an idea. Rita tells her sister, "You got a phone call earlier from one of your friends. I'll give you the message only if you drive me to the mall."
4. What great luck that Roberto overheard his supervisor say he would be back tonight at around 6 p.m. Whenever he comes in, everyone works hard for an hour trying to impress him until he leaves. Jack asked Roberto earlier if he could switch dinner hours with him. Roberto said no. Well, that was a mistake. Here comes Jack now. "Hey Jack," says Roberto, "You know, when I think about it, it doesn't matter to me if you want to switch dinner hours. I can go at six." "Really? Thanks a lot. I owe you one," says Jack.
5. "If you want to stay out later," Mom says, "then you need to act more responsibly. I am willing to consider a later curfew if you will make an effort to let me know when you are leaving the house and where you are going. If you can't do that, you can't stay out later. It's as simple as that."

MANIPULATION, COERCION, OR COMPROMISE? (CONTINUED)

6. “Hey, Joey, how’d you like to come with your big brother and the guys to a party this weekend?” Joey can hardly believe what he is hearing. His brother is three years ahead of him. His friends will be so impressed. “Sure, man,” Joey replies. “Great. I’m sure you’ll have fun,” his brother says and then punches him lightly on the arm. “By the way,” his brother adds as he is walking away, “Let’s just tell Mom and Dad that I’m taking you to the movies. They may not agree that you are ready for this kind of party, okay? So if they ask, we’re going to the movies.” “You got it!” says Joey. How lucky for him that his brother is looking out for him.

7. Fred calls Jane and says, “I need you to help me get my computer running. It’s crashed again and I’m not sure what’s wrong. Can you come over now?” Jane looks at her watch. It’s late and she has a test early tomorrow. “I’ll be over tomorrow, Fred. I’m beat and I have a test in the morning.” Fred’s response is immediate, “Unless you want me to call Samantha and tell her about our little chat earlier this evening, you’ll get over here now.” “You can’t be serious...Are you?” asks Jane. “No joke,” says Fred. “I’m on my way,” she says.

8. Rick cannot afford to fail another math assignment. “Please let me copy your homework, Kathy. I’ll fail this class if I don’t pass this marking period. You are the only one who can keep that from happening. Do you really want to be responsible for my having to repeat this class?” Kathy certainly doesn’t want to be responsible for that. That would be awful! She reluctantly gives him her homework.

9. Diane and Mario cannot agree on what to do this evening. Mario wants to go out for Chinese food and then to an action film. Diane would prefer a romantic Italian restaurant followed by a video at home. “How about this?” suggests Mario. “We’ll go to the restaurant that you want but afterwards we head to my movie. Deal?” Diane hates the idea of that movie, but at least she can get to her restaurant. “Okay,” she agrees.

10. “If you want to hang out with us, you need to be down with the rules. What I say goes. We defend our territory and we watch each other’s backs. We’ve got no room here for in-between loyalty. You are in or you are out. We’re not responsible for what happens to people who are out. You understand? So, what’s your choice?”

ANSWER SHEET

Read each scenario on the *Manipulation, Coercion, or Compromise?* worksheet and write below whether the scene demonstrated *manipulation, coercion, or compromise*.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

MANIPULATION, COERCION, OR COMPROMISE? (CONTINUED)

ANSWER KEY

1. Coercion
2. Compromise
3. Coercion
4. Manipulation
5. Compromise
6. Manipulation
7. Coercion
8. Manipulation
9. Compromise
10. Coercion

USE YOUR SKILLS AND WORK IT OUT

Use the four principles of good communication (Fact Sheets 1A-1D) to effect a positive outcome in the role plays below. An outline is provided, but you will need to improvise the important parts. The goal of each participant is to get as many needs met as possible. Sometimes emotions may run too high for productive discussion, and sometimes compromise is not possible. Think clearly about what your main goal is, and be sure to be a good listener. You may change the gender of the characters to suit your class's needs.

- 1. a.** Henry's father just got tickets to see the New York Knick's play the Chicago Bulls. He is totally psyched. He is a serious basketball fan—everyone knows this is a great opportunity. He also knows his girlfriend is going to be very upset because he promised her months ago that he would go with her to her brother's wedding. Oh well, he might as well tell her now and get it over with.
- b.** Susan has been planning for her brother's wedding for months. She is really looking forward to wearing the beautiful bridesmaid's dress, not to mention all the great fun they should have at that fabulous reception hall. It will be so special to have her boyfriend with her. She'll look at these photos for years to come.
- 2. a.** Tanya is well-known for her excellent babysitting skills. She is also known as hardworking and conscientious. She has decided that she will take this coming weekend off. She has a lot of school work to do and would like to have some time to spend with friends. No matter who calls, she's just going to say no.
- b.** Mrs. Rojas has an opportunity to get away for a rare weekend with her husband. Her sister has volunteered to take her two children overnight. Now, if Tanya will agree to watch them during the days this weekend, she can finally get some much needed time away with her husband. Tanya has always been so flexible. Mrs. Rojas is feeling very optimistic as she dials Tanya's phone number.
- 3. a.** After much thought, Gary decided the best choice for their band's first performance is to begin with the songs he wrote. This will introduce the audience to their unique sound. He doesn't want to sound like just another "wannabe" rock band. He is the lead singer, they are his songs, and in a sense he feels it is his band. This is really important to him. He hopes Ed won't disagree with him, but he has made up his mind.

USE YOUR SKILLS AND WORK IT OUT (CONTINUED)

- b.** Ed believes Gary is talented. He's looking forward to their first performance. They have all practiced a lot and things should go well. Ed's only concern is that Gary will want to showcase his original music. It certainly has promise, but it needs much more work before they can play it in public. When they go over the lineup of songs tonight, Ed is hoping Gary will not mention his own songs. Ed feels he has a responsibility to himself and the rest of the band, and he is not going to let Gary's ego get in the way of a successful first night for everybody. Gary did start up the band, but they are all in it together now.
- 4. a.** Julie does not want to go to her aunt's party this weekend. Her cousins are much younger than she is, and she is always bored to death. Her younger brother has a great time playing with the little kids. Her parents love hanging out with her aunt and uncle. No one seems to notice that she has nothing to do for hours. It's not fair that she should have to spend her whole Sunday there. These relatives live close enough that their families visit regularly. Julie has made up her mind that she is not going. She's old enough to be making these decisions for herself.
- b.** Ann (Julie's mother) is really looking forward to Sunday. She loves these pleasant family gatherings. She is grateful her sister lives so close. It's important to her that her children grow up knowing that they have caring family around them. Particularly now that Julie is a teenager, Ann is glad to have her regularly exposed to her sister and brother-in-law. They are great people who could be another source of support for her as she begins to cope with high school. No matter how crazy the family schedule gets, she is determined to keep her commitment to these gatherings.
- 5. a.** Jesse loves the extra cash he now has from working at Quik Burger. It's great not to ask his parents for money on weekends. He's going to Sandy's party tonight. He's been looking forward to it for a month. It is practically the social event of the year. A moment's stop at Quik Burger to get his paycheck and he's on his way. He hopes to avoid his boss. Mr. Mack enjoys intimidating people. This job is close to home, has decent pay, and has good hours. Jesse doesn't want to risk a scene with Mr. Mack.
- b.** Mr. Mack is annoyed. Another teenage employee just called in sick. Do these kids think he's stupid? He could hear other kids laughing in the background. You just can't get good help these days. These teenagers think they can set their own hours. When he was a kid, you were lucky to find work. You'd work whenever you could and be grateful for the job! Well, he sure as heck is not going to spend another night at Quik Burger because some darned kid wanted to go to a party. Mr. Mack pulls out his list to see who is working tonight. Just then, Jesse walks through the door. Mr. Mack plans to tell Jesse he must stay and work. If he has a problem with that, he can find another job!

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

Body language and emotional tone can confuse our efforts at communicating. (See Fact Sheet 1B for a review.) The content of our speech may not match our tone or our actions, such as when we say “I am perfectly fine!” while screaming and throwing our arms in the air. Consider the passages below. In each case, follow the directions for presenting the *same* words but by using your body language and tone to change the meaning.

1. *I've decided to quit the team. The other players don't seem to notice me. Why should I bother? I'm tired of trying so hard, and for what? We'll just see how things go without me.*

- a. Read this in a way that shows you are feeling very sad about this.
- b. Read this in a way that shows you are feeling very angry about this.
- What specific differences in body language and tone did you notice?

2. *I want you to stop picking on my brother. I understand that you are bigger and it's tempting to pick on smaller people, but I think you know what I mean when I say it has to stop. I'm not kidding. I'll be checking with my brother to make sure there are no more incidents.*

- a. Read this in an assertive and calm manner.
- b. Read this in an aggressive and threatening manner.
- What specific differences in body language and tone did you notice?

3. *My life is just great. I have lots of friends, a nice house, food to eat. Who could complain in my situation? So what if I haven't had a date in months? These are not the important things, right?*

- a. Read this in a sarcastic manner.
- b. Read this in a sincere manner.
- What specific differences in body language and tone did you notice?

4. *My parents drive me crazy! They are always watching out for me. I never know whether to scream or cry. I guess I'm just lucky to have them.*

- a. Read this in an angry, frustrated manner.
- b. Read this in a good-natured, humorous manner.
- What specific differences in body language and tone did you notice?

INTERPRETING NONVERBAL MESSAGES

Many nonverbal messages are ambiguous. We may scratch our heads, raise our eyebrows, or shift in our seats. Sometimes these gestures mean something, and sometimes they don't. Regardless of what we may intend our gestures to say, others often misinterpret them. How good are you at identifying underlying messages?

Part I

For each of the situations below, choose the response that is closest to how you would interpret the body language described.

1. In math class, the teacher announces that there will be a pop quiz. Sally looks over at her friend Joe and raises her eyebrows. Sally is saying:

a) I didn't expect this! I'm not going to know a single answer!	c) I told you she had something planned!
b) Can you believe what's happening?	d) This teacher has to be kidding!

2. When Della goes to get some ice cream at the local parlor, the male clerk behind the counter smiles at her. The clerk is saying:

a) You're cute.	c) Welcome to Al's Ice Cream Parlor.
b) I like my job.	d) I recognize you.

3. Marcus is riding the bus. He is sitting near the door. Almost all the seats are taken except the one right next to Marcus. An attractive girl gets up from her seat and moves to the empty seat next to him. The girl is saying:

a) I think you're cute.	c) I want to be near the door.
b) The passenger next to me had terrible body odor.	d) My exit is coming up. I'm about to get off the bus.

4. Carl and Tiana often talk about movies and books. One day Carl starts talking about A Farewell to Arms, which he says is his favorite book. He's going on about how romantic it is. Tiana says she's never read it. The next day, Carl brings her a copy wrapped in gift paper. Carl is saying:

a) I want to become more than friends.	c) I'm looking forward to discussing this book with you.
b) I value our friendship.	d) You really need to read more.

5. Jose lives a couple of blocks away from Sheila. After a late party in their neighborhood, Jose walks her home. Jose is saying:

a) I want to get to know you better.	c) I want you to invite me over.
b) I don't feel like walking home by myself.	d) A young woman shouldn't walk home alone.

Part 2

When you have finished choosing your own responses for each of the situations, use the space below to tally up your class's responses.

	Number of students choosing A	Number of students choosing B	Number of students choosing C	Number of students choosing D
Situation 1				
Situation 2				
Situation 3				
Situation 4				
Situation 5				

Part 3

Questions for discussion:

1. In general, do you consider yourself to be good at interpreting other people's nonverbal messages?
2. Were you surprised by the number of students who chose different answers than yours?
3. Can you think of other nonverbal gestures that can be interpreted in more than one way?
4. Can you think of a situation in which someone else was convinced that one of your own gestures had a meaning that you didn't intend? Did you resolve the misunderstanding?

BE AWARE OF ACCUSATORY LANGUAGE

It is obvious when we point fingers at people that we have already decided that they are wrong. We are accusing them, blaming them for something. We can do this with our words as well as with our fingers. When we begin conversations by referring to what *the other* person said or did, we are avoiding saying how *we* feel. Moreover, the person on the receiving end will no doubt respond in a defensive manner. Productive conversation is unlikely. On the other hand, if we state how we feel by using “I” language instead of “You did this” messages, we are likely to get a much better response.

Instructions:

Read the passages below. In the space provided, rewrite each one so that it expresses the author’s feelings from an “I” perspective.

Example: *You promised to take me! You can’t do this to me! This makes you a liar.*

Rewrite: *I am really disappointed. Not only was I looking forward to going, but I am also upset that you broke your promise to me.*

1. *You never let me do anything by myself! You treat me like a baby. You hover over me constantly. Do you really think I am that incompetent?*

Rewrite: _____

2. *You’re such a busybody! You don’t know how to mind your own business. You’re always trying to run my life. Get off my back!*

Rewrite: _____

3. *You make me feel like giving up. You never have anything positive to say. You should learn to be more supportive.*

Rewrite: _____

Many of us use indirect language to express our needs. You might ask another person “Are you hungry?” when you really mean that *you* are hungry. Maybe you are suggesting that you and the other person go grab a bite to eat. Or maybe you are asking the person to make you a snack. This lack of being direct can lead to confusion. Some of it is harmless, but some miscommunication can lead to real problems.

This exercise will give you practice in being direct. Reword each of the indirect statements and questions below so that they express the intended meaning more clearly.

Example: Are you hot?
Can you please turn up the air conditioner?

1. Are you finished eating those fries?

2. Are you busy Saturday night?

3. I’m washing my hair Saturday night.

4. Are you sure you need another hot fudge sundae?

5. Those brownies really smell good.

6. I sure would like another drink.

7. It’s crowded in here.

8. I wish I could go out to eat with you guys, but I don’t get paid until tomorrow.

FACT SHEETS

FOUR BASIC STEPS TO BETTER COMMUNICATION**Step One: Have a clear goal and know what you want to say.**

Certainly it is true that in day-to-day casual conversation we do not always need to think about what we want to say before we say it. Most of us talk to one another without a moment's thought about the process. It is spontaneous for us, almost like breathing. However, you may want to consider this first step if you experience any of the following:

- a. People often tell you that they do not understand what you are saying.
- b. You often feel that you are not getting your point across in a conversation.
- c. You know you are going to have a conversation in which there will be a conflict.

In any of these cases, it helps to take some time to consider what it is you want to say. You may even wish to rehearse it. If you can do this out loud, it will help you to see just where your thoughts and words falter. This gives you the opportunity to clarify those points.

In cases of conflict, it is essential that you clearly consider what your goals are before you begin any conversation. Conflicts are usually charged with emotion. Our emotions can lead us off the main topic and result in confusion for both parties. Try to stay focused on the aim of the conversation and do not get distracted by the distress you may be experiencing from being engaged in conflict.

FOUR BASIC STEPS TO BETTER COMMUNICATION (CONTINUED)**Step Two: Be aware of your emotions and body language.**

Emotions can confuse any conversation. If you are experiencing intense emotions of any kind, it may not be a good idea to have an important conversation. Contrary to popular belief, we do **not** always say things we *really mean* when we are intensely emotional. In fact, we often say things we do not mean and that do not even make much sense. Worse, we then spend days trying to retract these statements or “explain” them.

We may also agree to things in a state of high emotion that we later regret, or we find ourselves so overwhelmed by emotions that we cannot speak at all. Some people will make a few inept statements and walk away, wishing they had said more.

Whatever the case, it is clear that strong emotions can prevent you from thinking clearly and communicating effectively. It is a good idea to avoid conversations in these circumstances. However, if you cannot avoid a conversation, if the emotions come on suddenly and you are in a situation where you are forced to respond, you can at least take a moment for yourself and acknowledge your emotional state. A moment’s reflection may help you to curtail your comments and keep discussion to a minimum until you have had an opportunity to get emotionally balanced.

The other important part of this step is to recognize your body language. Aggressive body language can be particularly problematic. Examples of this include standing very close to the person you are speaking to, pointing fingers, flexing shoulders, stomping your feet, gesturing wildly, etc. People will stop listening to your words and focus on your body, which is telling them to defend themselves and take cover—and this is likely to come through in their responses to you. Other problematic body language includes not making eye contact when you speak, doing other things while someone is talking to you, looking around, examining your hands and fingers, etc. All of these gestures say, “I’m not paying attention,” and may offend someone.

Many other forms of body language can subtly influence your communication. For example, folding your arms across your chest and staring straight ahead may be interpreted as “I’m not really listening” in a defiant way. However, when people fold their arms across their chest and hang their head, it may be interpreted as “I’m not listening—I’ve given up.”

Talking is spontaneous for us, yet we are rarely aware of the manner in which we speak. Take some time and observe yourself while talking. You may be surprised by what you discover!

FOUR BASIC STEPS TO BETTER COMMUNICATION (CONTINUED)FACT
SHEET
1C**Step Three: Be a good listener and reflect this back.**

The best way for you to get your point across in a conversation is to be a good listener. Most of us get so caught up in what we want to say that we don't really listen to the other person. As soon as we sense any conflict, we begin formulating our next point. Thus, we stop listening to each other and instead begin to strategize and debate. Once this process begins, chances are good there will be no positive resolution because each person becomes invested in "winning." The stage has now been set for "winner and loser." And no one likes to lose!

To avoid a breakdown of communication, you must let your partner know that you are listening and that you understand. This can be accomplished by literally reflecting back to him/her what you have heard. How is this accomplished? Just say,

**"Let me see if I understand what you are saying to me.
I heard you say... Is that right?"**

It sounds so simple yet is a technique professional therapists have been using for years. Few things feel as good as knowing someone is listening to you and understands what you are trying to say. Please note this does not mean you have to agree with your partner. You just have to demonstrate that you accurately heard what was said. Feeling heard and understood will decrease the likelihood of miscommunication as well as keep emotions in check.

FOUR BASIC STEPS TO BETTER COMMUNICATION (CONTINUED)

FACT
SHEET
1 D

Step Four: Know how and when to compromise.

Even after using the first three techniques, there will still be times that people disagree. **Before** you compromise, ask yourself these questions:

- Are your emotions in check? Are you calm and able to make important decisions?
- Have you been listening well? Did you reflect this back to your partner? Are you sure you are not in agreement?
- Do you feel your opinion has been clearly expressed? Has it been understood by your partner? Has he/she reflected this back to you?

If you answered all these questions with a “yes,” proceed to the next section. However, if you have doubts, go back to the first three steps and make sure you can answer these questions affirmatively.

If you are sure you disagree, consider the following:

- Go back to the Step One: What is your goal? Make a list of the things you were trying to accomplish.
- Prioritize. If you have come to this point, it is obvious that you must try to compromise. Determine which things are most and least important.
- Make an offer. Concede a point that is not as important to you in exchange for one that is more important to you. If you make a concession, your partner will likely be influenced by this and be willing to do the same.

Finally, sometimes a compromise cannot be made. You may be asked to do something that you do not want to do or that seems ethically, morally, or legally wrong. In these cases, there is no compromise. You must stand by your principles and say no. Remember:

- You do not have to end conflicts in anger. It is acceptable to agree to disagree in a calm manner.
- Consider the “big picture.” One or two conflicts do not necessarily mean a whole project or relationship must come to an end. Avoid dramatic statements like “Forget the whole thing then!”

MANIPULATION, COERCION, AND COMPROMISE

Manipulation occurs when someone slyly arranges circumstances to suit his/her desires. Oftentimes, we are not aware when we have been manipulated. It is often secretive and aims to get us to do things we might not want to do by setting things up in such a way that we believe we have no other choice. For example:

You just have to help me learn this cheer! If I don't get it by tomorrow, I'll never make the squad. Pleeeeease. You're so naturally athletic. It will take you only a few minutes to help me. You already know it so it's not taking anything away from you. You can't be that selfish or insecure. You know you are going to make the squad. All I'm asking for is one hour of your time. Honestly, is that a lot to ask?

Evaluation: The person hearing this might think that “one hour” of time isn’t really “a lot to ask.” He/she might even feel flattered by or guilty about the “naturally athletic” remark. Either way, it was intended to make the person agree to the request. Moreover, it has been suggested that the person is either “insecure or selfish” if he/she chooses not to help. The truth is that it is neither selfish nor insecure to say no, being naturally athletic has nothing to do with it, and one hour *can* be a lot of time in a busy schedule. The bottom line is that this person is not obligated in any way to help this manipulator.

Coer cion is more overt. We are often aware when someone coerces us. It is forceful, and we resent it. It happens by physical threat or emotional blackmail. In these cases, it is clear that we are doing something we do not wish to do because a threatened alternative seems worse. For example:

You don't have to help me clean up the garage. No problem. After I tell Mom and Dad about the last entry I read in your diary, they'll be so upset they won't care whether I ever clean up this mess.

Evaluation: There is nothing subtle here—no sly attempts at flattery, no guilt trips. In this case, the individual being coerced has a simple choice: either help in the garage or deal with Mom and Dad about an obviously sensitive diary entry. If he/she chooses to help, it will be with a great deal of resentment due to a sense of being forced or blackmailed.

Compr omise implies a sense of fairness. Both parties believe that they have given a little but that they have also received a little in return. In many situations we cannot get what we want. It is important to prioritize your needs so you can enter into a compromise with a clear sense of what you are willing to concede and what you are not.

Sometimes it is hard to know when we are being manipulated. Worse, there are some people who are not aware that they tend to manipulate or coerce. Review the examples on Worksheet 5 and test your skills in this area.

SIGNS OF FAULTY COMMUNICATION

You need to work on improving your communication skills if:

- People often tell you that you are not making sense.
- People often ask you to repeat yourself: “Can you say that again? I don’t think I understand what you mean.”
- You have difficulty following conversations and find yourself looking for ways to ask people to repeat themselves.
- You often feel that you have “given in” or been “taken advantage of.”
- You never seem able to compromise.
- Frequently, you do not get your point across in conversation.
- Although you feel you have expressed your points, after your conversation you realize the other person has not had a chance to express his/hers.
- You get flustered during important conversations and miss important information.
- You realize you have not been listening but instead trying to organize your own thoughts and responses.
- You feel people are talking “too fast” and you can’t keep up.
- People often tell you to slow down: “You’re way ahead of us!”
- When conflicts emerge, you engage in trying to “win”—and lose perspective regarding the issue.

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cnvc.org/nvc.htm
- Communication: Key to Resolving Conflicts
<http://www.motiv8.com/personal/conflict.html>
- Confronting Conflict with Communication
<http://www.bydesigntrng.com/news5.htm>
- ParentTalk Newsletter: Adolescents and Communication Barriers
<http://www.tnpc.com/parentalk/adolescence/teens2.html>